

NOTES,
ON THE
ETYMOLOGY
OF A FEW
ANTIQUE WORDS.

BY
MR. BROTHERS.

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1796.

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NOTES,

On the Etymology of a few Antique Words.

By Mr. BROTHERS.

MALCOLM CANMORE: the latter word of whose name is Erse, and literally translated into English, is Great-head: this supposed term of reproach by writers of shallow comprehension, was not given from any thickness of stupidity, or the similitude of his head to an ox's; but he was denominated so by the common people, from the wisdom of his counsel to plan, and the prudence of his conduct to execute: a most excellent proof of which he gave by removing the fatal divisions of two distinctions of people in one country, and uniting them as brothers under one government. In England, and even still in this refined age, it is not very unusual to hear a Counsel that has acquired great professional eminence by a fine delivery of words, and a pleasing acuteness of reasoning, complimented with the appellation of a long-headed man: but surely from this, a remote Historian, with a competent knowledge of antiquity equally distant from this age, as this is from the eleventh century, would hardly infer from the compliment to an eloquent Barrister, that it meant his head to be in shape like a horse's, no more than we to suppose that Malcolm's was like that of an ox.

'DOUGLAS:' an Erse name of a noble family in Scotland, formed by the conjunction of two very expressive words, which properly translated into English, signifies

‘Dark-green.’ As king Malcolm, by his wise conduct procured a complimentary appellation, so this warlike Caledonian Chief, by first wearing, in lieu of an elevated banner, the more commodious dark-green plaid, for the better distinction of his person in battle, obtained, in consequence of the change, from his old white Caledonians, the new distinguishable name of Dou-glás.

‘SCOTCH:’ this term, as it is now applied, means the nation at large, and is a contracted corruption of its parent word ‘*Scotch-erfe*:’ it has no origin from that old Erse anciently spoken in common from the utmost verge of Caithness in the North, to the other extremity of Cornwall in the South: but it is derived from the old Saxon tongue, and was applied by that warlike people, though a name that expressed terror to themselves, indiscriminately to all the natives north of the Tweed. For the real Highlanders, to this very time, know no other domestic term of distinction for their country than ‘*Alliban*.’ But the just etymology of the word is the most essential information to communicate, *if there can be any thing essential in it*. It must be remembered by all persons conversant with the North-Britons, that to this very day they retain a kind of hereditary attachment to the chequered plaid, the Lochaber axe, and the Claymore: the latter appellation, like Scotch from Scotch erse, is contracted, and now given to every *single-banded* sword, when formerly it was only given to them of *two*. The Claymore of the renowned Robert Bruce is still preserved in a castle near Clackmannan; it measures a little more than six

feet in length, and was such as was then made use of in common with the Lochaber axe." The Saxons, and other swarms of invaders from Germany, seeing an enemy determined to oppose them with such terrible weapons, gave them the name of Scotch erse, which literally means, to the comprehension of our capacities in the language of this age 'The *Erse cutters*.' And no unapt one, considering that whoever received a blow from either weapon, must have been dreadfully cut, or scotched *, if not instantly killed.

'PICTS: an Erse word, corrupted by an early ignorance of letters in the pronunciation from *Pickie*: for as the Saxons gave the appellation of Scotch to the Northern Alliban, from their use of large swords and battle axes, so they as well marked their invaders with a distinction equally expressive, from the destruction they made with their long-handled *Pikes*. As a proof that the name of weapon was then given to the hostile strangers that appeared armed with it, their descendants in the lowlands have always since in the history of Scotland been distinguished by the name of *Picts*: the similitude in pronunciation to that of *Pickie*, or indeed now *Pikes*, is so near, as not to be doubted but the one is derived from the other.

'CAER:' is a Welsh word, which properly translated into the English of this day, means a Seat, whether the large Castle of a Chief standing alone, or his simple House surrounded by others: it was applied then, as it is now, for a term of eminence to distinguish the re-

Scotch it, is a term frequently used in England, and generally now applied to the scoring deep of a piece of meat: the words are, *to scotch it with a knife*.

sidence of some great man. So then *Caer-Lion*, is the Seat of Lion; and *Caernarvon*, the Seat of Narvon.

‘*ABER*:’ whether to *Conway* in Wales, or to *Deen* in Scotland, means an established place where toll was paid, whether to enter the town of an independant Chief by land, or by water to cross the river in a boat; for in both situations the terms are to be found. Travellers, however, in giving the etymology of this word, have in general applied it as meaning the source of a river: but how can it in the least be accounted so with respect to *Aberconway*, when the source of that fine river, which runs close by it, is full twelve miles inland from the town? This town was anciently called *Caer*——, the Seat, or Residence of ——: one of the English Edwards, not later than the Third, after it had nearly been destroyed, rebuilt and changed its name, giving in addition that of *Aber*, from the impost he established to cross the river; this term was as familiar to the Welsh then, as a place for the payment of some trifling sum, as that of *Ferry* or *Turnpike* is to us now. Had not the Roman legions, the Saxon allies, the Danish robbers, and the Norman conquerors, furiously over-run England, each in their turn obliterating from the towns, villages and rivers, their ancient *Alliban* distinctions, we should have at this day Can’s, *Caer*’s, and *Aber*’s, as common as they are still in Wales.—Most authors of note, in their account of Caledonia, have invariably applied the opprobrious epithet of ‘*vagrant*,’ or wanderer, to mean the word ‘*Scotch*.’ Certainly nothing is more erroneous, as I have clearly demonstrated. The learned Mr. Gibbon, though liberal in sentiment,

and bold in description, has inclined to the old beaten tract, and with it, added to them that of '*wheat-eaters*; as if the single word '*cruitnach*,' i. e. wheat, from which he derives his authority, implied as much.—When I first saw this gentleman, endued by nature to be a historian, it was a few years ago, as he was ascending to enter the street from the low door of a bookfeller's shop in Piccadilly. He saluted me with a smile from one of the most remarkable faces I ever saw in my life, while I uttered involuntarily—"It is like the full moon rising in the East, to dispel the darkness of the night."—To return to my former subject, and to do away for ever the undeserved application of reproach from a very brave and worthy people, some of whom I know, and have served in the navy under, is the reason of my writing these few notes, to give the world the true derivation of the words '*Scotch* and '*Pict.*' I intended to have taken a greater circuit, and to have concluded at '*London*,' but my keeper, though denominated a Fellow of the Royal Society, is so inimical to learning, as to forbid even the servants of the house, under the penalty of dismissal, to supply me particularly with either pen, ink, or paper: his own words were, on giving the absolute prohibition, "Gad! I must take care of myself; your pen would soon ruin me, if you were allowed to write of things out of this house." He is a Jew, and once might have had some pretensions to knowledge; but now his mind is absorbed in utter darkness, as his submitting to be degraded from the genteel sphere of a Physician to act under that of a hired Ishmalite evi-

dently demonstrates. When remonstrating with him on the injustice of such conduct, his reply was curious, and is as follows: " Sir, I am an Agent of Government, and act entirely by the Chancellor's orders." Here are certainly exhibited symptoms of a weak understanding, or a servile disposition! About ten days after he had first visited me in Crown-street, I accused him of submitting to great meanness, by his frequent visits to insult me: for after the first three or four times to satisfy his judgement, I could not consider them in any other light. The answer is curious also, and is as follows: " Why to be sure, Mr. Brothers, you are not insane, nor is there any thing improper in your words and behaviour: but for writing that book, you must be considered so." What Dr. Munro thought at this time, I will not say, but he appeared astonished at this bold assertion of his Colleague.—The first time this medical gentleman visited me, after entering the room, he exclaimed with open mouth, and staring eyes, " are you the person, Sir, we are ordered to visit? Good God! there is nothing the matter with you."—I replied, there was not.—I wish the subsequent conduct of this man had been regulated by similar expressions of integrity.

Mr. Ford! I thank you for the only civility shewn me in Crown-street: I mention your name on purpose now, that at a future time the Duke of Portland, to whose Office you belonged, may acknowledge the favour as done to him, and that every Member of Administration may load you with praise.

Islington Mad-House, March 15, 1796.

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